



TRANSPORTATION

“The development of transportation routes was extremely important due to the relative isolation of many areas in the county [Lane] and to the geographic barriers to travel presented by the Coast, and the Cascade and Calapooya Mountains. Earliest non-Indian travel into central Lane County was from the north, up the wide, flat Willamette River Valley from its confluence with the Columbia River 100 miles from Lane County. Circulation through the county prior to 1846 was primarily over Indian trails or by river.”¹

Early overland transportation routes in Lane County consisted primarily of Native American paths and pack trails, which followed the features of the natural landscape. When settlers set out to establish Donation Land Claims, they followed these dirt paths. Their horse drawn wagons tended to widen the trails, which evolved into roads. Many of these passageways were along the foothills, as annual flooding and excessive rain often made the valley floor impassable during winter months.

“By the time settlers began to arrive in the late 1840s, only one of the many trails was still in active use” – the current Applegate Trail.² In 1846, a party led by Jesse Applegate explored and laid out this route as a southern alternative to the Oregon Trail. There were actually two routes of the Applegate Trail that passed through Lane County. The western route is approximated by Territorial Road, while the eastern route passed through Cottage Grove, Creswell, Eugene and Junction City near the west bank of the Willamette River. “The 14-mile section between Eugene and Junction City became known locally as ‘the river road.’”³ The Applegate Trail was the earliest local transportation development beyond path and river travel. Both routes of the trail were shown on an 1850 map produced by federal surveyors, considered the first accurate map of Lane County.

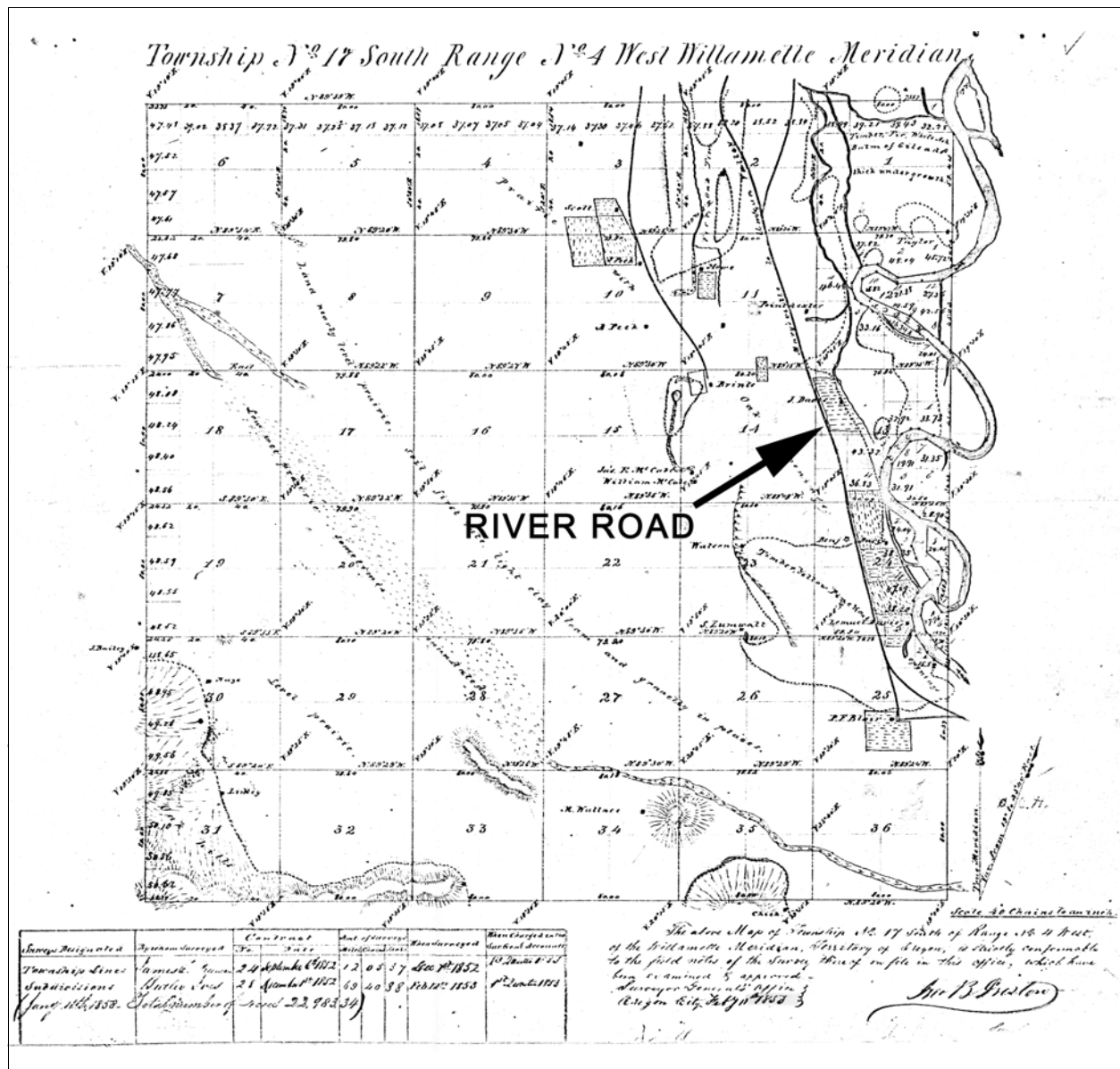
During the pioneer period, transportation was the key to economic growth. Because of this, communities tended to establish roadways and ferry crossings upon their founding. Shortly after his arrival to the area in 1846, Eugene Skinner established a ferry service located near the foot of the current Ferry Street Bridge. By 1848, Jacob Spores was ferrying foot passengers across the McKenzie River north of Eugene in a canoe.⁴

Stage Lines

By 1850, a daily north/south stage line passed through the Willamette Valley. These coaches were generally drawn by six horses and connected Portland to Marysville,

California, in just under a week. However, "stage travel was uncomfortable, and passengers often chose to walk over certain notorious sections, especially the corduroy roads made of tree trunks laid side by side".⁵ Roads tended to be dry and dusty in the summer and muddy in the winter. Most travel was done out of necessity and not for pleasure.

Stage stops, such as the one at Renfrew's in Eugene City, provided food, lodging, and an exchange of horses and drivers. Stops were originally located in farmhouses, then established as separate buildings near the main road. Small communities often developed around the stage stops, with taverns, supply stores, and blacksmiths to serve travelers. By 1860, regular commercial stage service had been established in Eugene, and carried mail, freight and passengers. However, its usage was curtailed by the connection of the local railroad to California in 1887. Stages were then used for more



General Land Office (GLO) map from 1853 showing information recorded in 1852. What was to become River Road is pointed out and visible next to the Willamette River in the upper right quadrant.

local purposes and for shorter stretches, such as to Mapleton, until their demise in the early 1900s.

In 1856, the main road north from Eugene City to Corvallis, and on to Portland, was established and followed the current Blair Boulevard and River Road. This route cut across the Donation Land Claims in the area, and as such, many of the parcels are oriented towards it. Other roads in this neighborhood tended to be irregular, as they followed claim lines, many of which were not quite rectangular or lined up with one another. "Where the terrain was level, roads built after the Territorial Roads and spur roads to individual farms often followed section or quarter section lines".⁶

Steamboats

While communities situated on the lower stretches of the Willamette River were able to accommodate steamboat travel early on, due to their deep waters, this method of transportation did not reach Eugene until the mid-1850s. Establishment of local steamship service was prompted by area farmers and loggers. They were frustrated by the delays caused in transporting goods over primitive roads. "At that time the roads were virtually impassable to wagons during eight months of the year, so the river was (perceived to be) the best means for moving produce and lumber out, and just as important, for bringing manufactured goods in."⁷ An agreement was made with the captain of the *James Clinton* to travel further up river to Eugene City in exchange for additional freight business. On March 12, 1856, the first commercial stern wheeler arrived in Eugene, connecting the community with the rest of the state.

In the 1860s, the People's Transportation Company was founded by the McCullys to promote transportation even further up river. These Harrisburg merchants ran steamboats to Eugene beginning in 1862 and to Springfield as of 1869. "Unfortunately, the river at Eugene proved to be quite shallow, and steamer traffic was limited to only four to six months out of the year, during periods of high water. Snags and uncharted sand and gravel bars were a continued problem, making steamboat travel quite unreliable."⁸ The river proved to be neither a convenient or profitable method of local transport. Although service continued through the turn of the century, the arrival of the railroad in 1871 essentially ended the local steamboat era.

Railroads

"The most significant transportation development for the economic and population growth of Lane County was the arrival of the Oregon and California Railroad in 1871. While the railroad went no further south than Lane County until the late 1880s, Lane County now had convenient, fast transport for freight and passengers to the larger towns and shipping centers in the north valley."⁹

Ben Holladay, who was laying out the new lines, insisted on a \$40,000 payment for the tracks to pass through Eugene and not Springfield. The community agreed and in October 1871, the Oregon and California (O&C) Railroad arrived in Eugene. The train *JB Stevens* was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd at the depot, a wood building near Fifth Avenue and Willamette Street. The line initially extended only as far south as Roseburg, but still provided a vital link for the community's growing agriculture and timber industries. In 1885, the O&C went bankrupt and was acquired by Henry Villard, who changed its name to Southern Pacific (SP) Railroad. The line to California was completed two years later, cementing the railroad's domination of long distance transportation.



Looking south in 2005 from the Maxwell Street Bridge at the Eugene rail yard. Photo by Caitlin Harvey.

The railroad not only made personal travel comfortable again, but also had a tremendous impact on local economic development. It opened up huge new markets for the export of local goods and produce, allowing for the creation of affordable and timely distribution systems. The railroad also connected the relatively isolated Oregon country with the more established states, easing the flow of information, trends, 'modern goods' and induced a new wave of settlers to head west.

While the train provided for longer trips, horse and wagons were still the primary transportation mode for short distances. By the late 1870s, it was apparent that improvements to local transportation and roads were necessary. In 1876, a covered bridge was constructed in the vicinity of the current Ferry Street Bridge, eliminating the need for Skinner's ferry service. In addition, "In 1877, the City Council ordered all intersections graded and completed with timbered street crossings and all property holders on Willamette from the depot to the southern boundary (14th Avenue) were directed to fill sinks in the street."¹⁰

The first improvements to the old wagon and stage roads were motivated by the need to create "market roads" or to ease the transport of agricultural goods to market. Lorane Highway is one such road. By the 1880s, the major routes leading in and out of the Eugene area were the east and west Territorial Roads, a county road leading south (now Alder Street), Coburg Road leading north, and a road leading to Junction City and Monroe that approximates the current Prairie Road.

In 1891, the City of Eugene granted a franchise to Henry W. Holden to construct and operate a local street railway system. "On June 26, the line opened for business with mule-drawn trolleys traveling down Willamette Street from the train depot to 11th Avenue and east to the University."¹¹ Although the line met with moderate success, service was discontinued in 1904. Two years later, the city granted another franchise for a local transportation system. It authorized the Willamette Valley Company to construct an electric street car line that would extend to Springfield. The system opened to the public

in the fall of 1907, with four lines originating near the train depot. Three lines operated within the City of Eugene and a fourth line ran to Springfield.

Automobiles

The first automobile arrived in Eugene in 1904; two years later only four vehicles were locally owned. Within the next few years however, the number of automobiles in Oregon skyrocketed, and by 1912, there were over ten thousand cars on the roads. Automobiles provided travelers with a tremendous sense of freedom. Trips no longer had to be planned around the train's time schedule. Travelers could go where they wanted, when they wanted, in the privacy of their own vehicle.

The introduction of the automobile created a market for new services and commercial enterprises. Filling stations, garages, repair shops and auto part supplies were just some of the businesses created to fill the utilitarian needs of car owners. Between 1910 and 1914, the number of automobile-related businesses in Eugene increased from two to nearly twenty, the majority of these operating near the downtown core. It was close to 1920 when River Road received its first service station, a Richfield gasoline outlet located at 420 River Road.



River Road in 1920. Photo courtesy of Clara Yockey.

The increasing usage of the automobile also created a need for additional and better quality roads. In 1913, the Oregon Legislature established the state highway system and designated a route, the Pacific Highway, from Portland to the California state line. In Eugene, the highway originally followed the current Franklin Boulevard, Blair Boulevard, and River Road. The highway was improved for year-round use, although it would not be paved until 1920. By 1926, both the Oregon and California sides were improved and "...the Pacific Highway was the longest continuous paved road in the world."¹²

The designation of River Road as a state highway greatly impacted the appearance of the neighborhood's agrarian landscape. In addition to an increase in the numbers of roadways were the business and services catering to the automobile itself. The improved road network allowed people to live farther away from the established neighborhoods near the center of town. Additional residents began moving to this agricultural area north of town. According to the *Eugene Register Guard*, "once River Road became a highway, people came out from the city and took up plots of ground and built houses and settled down with cherries and chickens."

Despite the appearance of the automobile, the railroad was still the dominant force in long distance travel and the transportation of goods in the early 1900s. In 1908, Southern Pacific replaced its wood depot at the north end of Willamette Street with a new brick structure. Three years later, the railroad completed its branch line from Eugene to Coos Bay. The line created a “Y” where it departed from the main track, near the intersection of River Road and Blair Boulevard.

In 1912, the Oregon Electric Railroad Company began laying tracks on both the east and west sides of the Willamette Valley. Two years later, the company built a station in Eugene and ran five daily passenger trains to Portland. In 1916, the Oregon Electric began construction on its Blair Street terminal yard. From here, tracks extended into the eastern and western reaches of the county. The rail line connected widely scattered farmsteads and was key to the development of early dairy farming. Four years later, due to increased demand, the railroad more than doubled the number of its daily trains to Portland.

In 1915, Southern Pacific purchased the local street car system. Within five years, however, the impact of the automobile on local rail travel was apparent, in the form of drastically reduced ridership. In 1926, the line to Springfield was discontinued and the following year, service within Eugene ceased. However, Southern Pacific would continue to provide a local transportation option. The city authorized the railroad to substitute a motor bus system for the streetcar network, and Oregon Motor Stages was soon in operation.

In 1925, community leaders were apprized of a plan by Southern Pacific Railroad to locate their new rail yard in Springfield and turn Eugene into a spur line. Hoping to retain this important industry, several viable parcels of land in Eugene were identified and offered to the railroad at no charge. After Southern Pacific refused these lots, the leaders essentially told the railroad to choose the land it wanted and that the city would obtain it on their behalf. Part of the bargain, however, was that the railroad relinquish title to the land it had acquired in Springfield.

Southern Pacific chose a 205-acre site in the agricultural lands to the northwest of town, west of River Road and anchored on the south by the current Roosevelt Boulevard. The new facility would stretch diagonally to the northwest, for approximately one-half mile. To accommodate the new yard, some changes were made to the area’s street system. Blair Boulevard was closed off where it would cross new tracks; County Road, later Bethel Drive, was diverted; and a short access road was extended from Roosevelt Boulevard into the yard. The new yard became the western boundary of the River Road neighborhood, creating a barrier to the lands to its west.

Development of the terminal yard began in 1925 and continued for the next four years. The first building to be constructed was a tie treatment facility, which was intended to serve Southern Pacific operations as far south as San Francisco. “Once completed (in 1926), the tie facility was considered one of the finest and most modern in the United States.”¹³ The next buildings to be constructed included the roundhouse and turntable, oil storage tanks, a yard office, a car repair shed, pump house and a machine shop. The railroad also constructed a new bridge spanning the Willamette River at Springfield,

designed to handle the heavier locomotives. The need for the bridge was anticipated due to the opening of the Natron Cut-off/Cascade Line which would reach into central Oregon. By March 1926, Southern Pacific began the consolidation of its operations at the Eugene facility, when it transferred its freight division from the soon to-be-defunct Junction City station.

During this period, the automobile industry was also making great strides. With an ever-growing number of vehicles on the road came an increasing demand for services and businesses that catered to them. New opportunities for specialized employment and manufacturing were created. For example, Polk's 1925 Classified Business Directory for Lane County includes these sub-categories, among others, under "Automobile": Accessories, Body Builders, Bumpers, Electricians, Enamel, Greasing, Polish, Rims and Wheels, Springs, Tires, Top Repairing, and Wrecking.

Following the paving of River Road as the Pacific Highway in 1923, automobiles were being used for personal travel of increasing lengths. Businesses catering to drivers sprang up along the highways. Of the ten service stations operating in 1925, five were along Pacific Highway, with four on Blair Boulevard and the fifth on River Road. Overnight accommodations began to be developed in the form of automobile camps, the pre-cursor to motels. These camps generally consisted of a gas station, communal restroom, and small, detached cabins. The Cabin City Auto Camp, at 225 River Road, was one of three operating in Eugene in the mid-to-late 1920s.

In the early 1930s, due to its designation as a highway, River Road became an important transportation route and access to it was seen as key to development. A study of land patterns in the River Road-Santa Clara area by Michael Spyrou¹⁴ included approximately one-half of the land in the River Road neighborhood. According to Spyrou, in 1931 fifteen of the nineteen streets in his study area were tributaries of River Road. This phenomenon is attributable to two main development trends that took place in the area. First, was the practice of Donation Land Claim holders creating roads leading from their property directly to River Road, the main and only road through the area in the late 1850s. As these claims were divided, new owners would create their own access to the main road, as necessary.



Cabin City Auto Camp in 1927 at 225 River Road. Photo by Kennell-Ellis courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (KE1033).

The second trend was the tendency for land owners to subdivide their properties so that the new parcels faced existing streets, creating access and eliminating the need for creating infrastructure. As was common, these early roads were named after adjacent

property holders and include (Frank M.) Horn Lane, (D.C.) Howard Avenue, (Jerry) Beebe Lane and (Charles A.) Hardy Avenue. Early Metsker Maps of the area show that the phenomenon occurring in Spyrou's study area was indicative of the entire River Road neighborhood.

During the Depression years of the early 1930s, several road-related projects occurred in the River Road neighborhood. This included work by Lane County, such as the construction of the 1932 River Loop covered bridge, designed by Nels Roney. "Structurally, it is typical of the conservatively designed Howe trusses favored by Lane County bridge builders for so many years."¹⁵ Larger scale road projects included improvements to sections of the Pacific Highway that ran through Eugene, in preparation for it becoming an interstate highway. This resulted in the route following Blair Boulevard and River Road being designated as Highway 99 North (99N).

Street improvements were completed primarily by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which was created to provide work to the unemployed, largely in the form of community improvement projects. "In the depression years of the 1930s, road crews of the CCC paved and graveled roads throughout the county."¹⁶ In 1935, Eugene was still in the process of upgrading its roads, as 15 of 68 miles of roads were still dirt or gravel. As work focused on streets within the city limits, few improvements were made in the River Road neighborhood that were not directly related to the Pacific Highway.

Due to its low elevation and proximity to the Willamette River, the River Road area was prone to frequent flooding. During such times, Highway 99 (i.e., River Road) was impassible. In 1936, the Oregon State Highway Commission relocated Highway 99 west of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks and terminal yard, to West Sixth Avenue, Garfield Street, Roosevelt Boulevard and Prairie Road. This left Blair Boulevard and River Road to serve mainly local traffic.

In 1937-38 the present-day Highway 99 route from Eugene to Junction City, including the overpass above the Coos Bay branch rail line, was completed. In 1941, Sixth and Seventh avenues were converted to a one-way couplet between the overpass and Willamette Street in downtown Eugene, due to the large increase in highway traffic.

Highway 99 was relocated to its present route through Eugene between 1948 and 1951, beginning with the complete relocation and reconstruction of Franklin Boulevard and the railroad tracks between the University of Oregon campus and Judkins Point. At the same time, East Broadway was widened to four lanes. Finally, a new Ferry Street Bridge and railroad viaduct were completed, providing a direct connection from Coburg Road to downtown Eugene and the University, and linking Highway 99 between the Sixth-Seventh couplet and East Broadway.

As automobiles became more affordable and paved roads made traveling easier, additional motorists took to the roads. Additional services sprung up, but most were concentrated along the highway, to serve the bulk of the traffic. By 1944, of the 31 automobile camps in the Eugene Area, at least 22 were located on Highways 99N and 99S, including West Sixth and West Seventh avenues. In addition to the Cabin City Auto Court, the River Road neighborhood also boasted the Green Gables Auto Court

and the Fir Grove Auto Camp. Once sited on the “outskirts” of town, these new accommodations were being developed around the city center and were increasingly referred to as courts, lodges and motels.

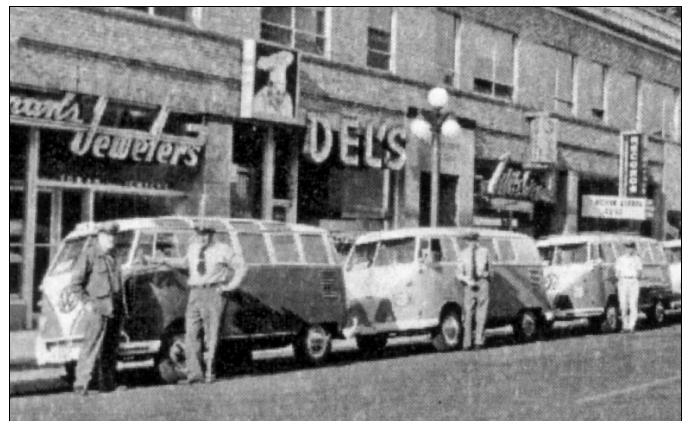
“The construction of Highway 99N...increased the local traffic capacity of River Road and offered more opportunities for favorable commercial locations along it; this also had the effect of making it a more favorable residential site.”¹⁷ Commercial development became oriented toward the neighborhood, and by 1948, an appliance store, department store, dry cleaners and small offices sat among the six gas and oil stations lining the road. Unlike this new commercial development and also unlike the residential development of its past, however, the new residential growth was not oriented to River Road, but was still dependent on it.



Cow at gas station during the 1946 flood. Photo courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN2052)

In 1946, according to Spyrou’s land use study of the area, more than half of the 63 roads in the neighborhood directly joined River Road. This resulted primarily from earlier residential development, which had new additions abutting existing streets, and the location of the Southern Pacific Railroad terminal yard, which created a buffer on the neighborhood’s west side. Growth after World War II reinforced the focus on River Road, as new development was simply sited within the street network that was already established. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, 14 new residential plats were filed in the neighborhood, with an average of 11 parcels each. These were primarily replats of older additions or the infill of vacant parcels that were already surrounded with development. As in the past, these additions were located on streets that already existed, many of which either directly intersected with River Road or fed onto streets that led to River Road, such as Park Avenue.

In 1947, local bus operations were purchased by City Bus Lines, which maintained the system for almost a decade. After a near-bankruptcy, the bus drivers formed a driver-owned cooperative to take over operations in 1958. By the end of the following year, the Emerald Transportation System had purchased twenty



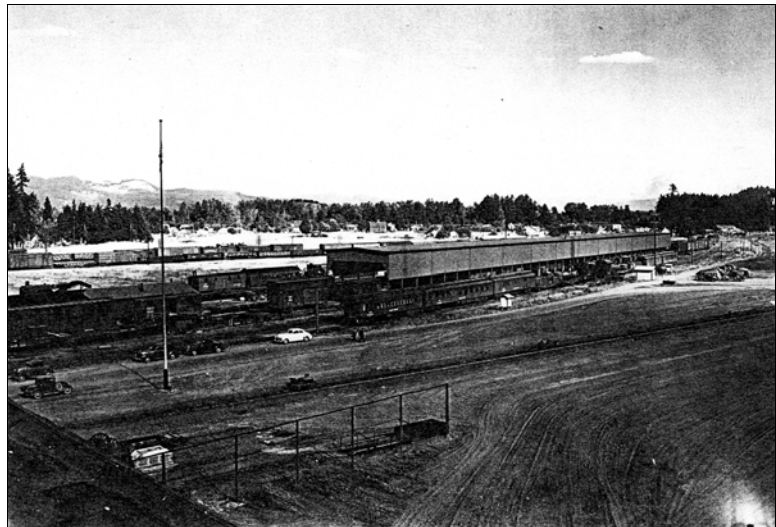
The Emerald Transportation System and their fleet of Volkswagens in the 1960s. Photo from City files.

Volkswagen minibuses, which served the residents of Eugene and the fringe areas for much of the 1960s.

From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, a number of large-scale road projects were undertaken around Eugene. Lane County began to expand its street network and improve its roadways to the north of Eugene. "Using federal timber receipts, Lane County built the roads that served the fringe developments," including Irvington Drive, Royal Avenue and Barger Drive.¹⁸ In 1956, Congress established the Interstate Highway System, and local construction of Interstate 5 began. As the freeway was located on the outskirts of town, its completion included the Interstate 105 spur, which connects the freeway to downtown Eugene.

During the time that these freeways were being developed, a number of changes had occurred at Southern Pacific's Eugene yard. In the late 1930s, improvements were made to increase efficiency, accommodate longer freight trains, and handle larger locomotives. For example, additional stalls were added to the roundhouse and a larger turntable was installed.

In 1944, Southern Pacific decided it would no longer purchase steam locomotives as diesel electric power was more efficient. Within two years, the first diesel freighters were in operation and were soon followed by diesel passenger trains. The introduction of a new power source required new and updated service facilities. As a result the Eugene yard went through another round of modernization and upgrades in the 1950s. This included its conversion from a flat switching yard to one using radar operated gravity, part of a \$6 million expansion completed in 1956.



Looking east in 1942 towards the River Road area from the machine shop in the Eugene rail yard. Photo by Fred Davis and courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (T60/L79-301)

It was during this time that Southern Pacific entered into a variety of business ventures that would affect the look and use of its local facility. In 1955, the railroad opened Southern Pacific Pipelines, a refined petroleum products pipeline. Storage tanks, pipelines, and an associated spur line were developed in the northwest section of its yard. In 1958, the Pacific Electric Motor Transport Company, a trucking subsidiary that provided rail-to-store delivery, relocated its Northern District Headquarters to Eugene.

In 1962, Southern Pacific expanded its yard north to Irving. The railroad also transferred a number of functions and hundreds of employees to Eugene from its southeast Portland yards. Two years later, Southern Pacific constructed a new highway

transport terminal next to the yard, enabling the company to take advantage of the new interstate road system. These two actions added to the population surge in the River Road area and surrounding neighborhoods.

In 1961, a Eugene-area transportation report suggested that a number of changes be made to facilitate the flow of vehicular traffic in northwest Eugene. One was construction of a viaduct crossing the Southern Pacific tracks and linking River Road with Chambers Street. It would be nearly 30 years before the viaduct, the Chambers Connector, was built.

The 1961 report also suggested construction of what is now known as the Northwest Expressway, along the east side of the Southern Pacific rail yard from River Road north to Prairie Road near Irving. Expressway construction began in 1968, and the Park Avenue-Irving Road section was completed in 1971. The Northwest Expressway was fully completed in 1980, when sections between River Road and Park Avenue, and between Irving Road and Prairie Road opened to traffic.

The most ambitious of the suggested projects was the so-called “Peripheral Road,” which would come to be known as Beltline Highway. The first segment of the Beltline, a two-lane expressway between River Road and Coburg Road, was completed in late 1961. Three years later, Beltline was extended west to Highway 99, and an interchange with the new Delta Highway was built just east of the Willamette River. By 1970, Beltline was a full-fledged freeway through the River Road area, linking Interstate 5 and Highway 99, with a two-lane extension south from Highway 99 to West 11th Avenue.

In 1964, Lane County built the Delta Highway on the agricultural lands of Goodpasture Island. It provided a connection between Beltline Highway and Interstate 105 to its south. “The Interstate freeway system was one aspect of the postwar technological explosion that had a very significant impact on Eugene’s and the region’s development. Its construction heralded the accelerated growth of Oregon cities and the accompanying changes in land use and attitude toward our natural environment.”¹⁹

The construction of the freeway system accelerated growth and the accompanying changes in land use. It greatly facilitated the commercial and residential development of the River Road neighborhood, among other effects. Automobile-related development began to occur at or near the freeway interchanges, such as the River Road exit from Beltline. As these new commercial enterprises tended to focus on the recreational traveler, gas stations, motels and restaurants were the most common services provided. The freeway system also allowed people to live farther from their place of work and allowed development on land once considered too rural.

The 1960s saw the introduction of the large-scale subdivision in the River Road neighborhood. Developments of this size required additional roadways to be installed, which began to change the look of the area’s transportation network. The new streets began to conform to the grid pattern that most of the city was based on, yet which had remained largely absent from this neighborhood. During this time, curvilinear streets

and cul-de-sacs were also introduced to a landscape that only knew the meandering of Marion Lane south of River Road Elementary School.

These contemporary roads and large subdivisions are concentrated in the west and northwest sections of the neighborhood. These areas, which back up to the Southern Pacific rail lines, developed later than others due to their comparably inaccessible location. The extension of existing streets, such as North Park Avenue and Silver Lane, helped promote construction in this pocket. Despite the introduction of these new road features, the main street pattern in this neighborhood remained unchanged – the majority of arterials still lead to River Road.



Construction of the Delta Highway prior to the Jefferson Street Bridge, 1964. Photo by Harry Gross courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum (GN252)

Transportation Endnotes

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